

OCCURRENCE OF REDWING WARBLER *HELIOLAIS ERYTHROPTERA* AND SOME OTHER OBSERVATIONS FROM THE NORTHERN KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

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Abstract — Some ornithological observations made during a brief visit to the unique Punda Maria — Pafuri area of the Kruger National Park, Republic of South Africa, include confirmation of the Redwing Warbler *Heliolais erythroptera* as an addition to the South African list, Forest Weaver *Symplectes (Ploceus) bicolor* and Bully Canary *Serinus sulphuratus* previously unrecorded from the Park, confirmation of the occurrence of Lesser Barred Warbler *Camaroptera stierlingi*, Purple-banded Sunbird *Nectarinia bifasciata* and Yellow White-eye *Zosterops senegalensis*, and records involving the extended range or seasonal occurrence of other bird species.

Introduction

To many ornithologists the most exciting part of the Kruger National Park (KNP), is the far northern portion from the vicinity of Punda Maria to the Limpopo. This is due to the presence there of a number of peripheral bird species which are not found elsewhere in the Republic of South Africa. On ornithological grounds alone, without the strong support which would be forthcoming from botanists, mammalogists and herpetologists, there can be no condoning of the proposed opencast coal-mining here. This would inevitably cause major and undesirable ecological changes in the unique and vulnerable series of habitats.

Approximately half the avian species on the southern African list have been recorded from the Kruger National Park. Despite the basis laid by Pienaar & Prozesky (1961, 1967) and Kemp (1974), building on the preliminary records (unpublished) of Rowland-Jones and others, obviously much data on the avifauna remain to be recorded. Consequently these supplementary observations were made between 1979.07.16 — 1979.07.21. Vernacular names tend to follow those of Prozesky (1974).

Results and Discussion

Class: Aves

Order: Falconiformes
R123 ROCK KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus* Family: Falconidae
GEWONE ROOIVALK

This species is described by Kemp (1974) as uncommon, only regularly seen during summer, and only recorded from the flats in the north-eastern regions of the Park. Two adults were seen perched together 14 km along road S60 from Punda Maria towards Klopperfontein (1979.07.17).

Order: Charadriiformes
R237 KITTLITZ PLOVER *Charadrius pecuarius* Family: Charadriidae
GEELBORSKIEWIET

In addition to the four localities mentioned by Kemp (1974), several plovers of this species were seen on 1979.07.21 in the Letaba River where road HI-6 crosses it.

R246 WHITE-CROWNED PLOVER *Vanellus albiceps* WITKROONKIEWIET

Despite Kemp (1974) pointing out that this “very uncommon” plover is resident on the Levubu River in the Pafuri area, McLachlan & Liversidge (1978) reiterate the fallacy of “old records” from Pafuri. On 17 and 19 July 1979 a single specimen of this plover was studied and photographed in the Levubu River at the Pafuri picnic-site, uttering its shrill “peep-peep-peep-peep” call. On 1979.07.19, two km upstream, several of these plovers were observed and photographed. Some were well away from the river, feeding in the shaded fig forest among fallen leaves. Another was observed on a sand bank, several times in what appeared to be a feeding association with hippo walking on the same sandbank, seeming to benefit by capturing disturbed insects.

Order: Apodiformes
R388 MOTTLED SPINETAIL *Telecanthura ussheri* Family: Micropodidae
GESTIPPELDE
STEKELSTERT

At the same locality about two km upstream from the Pafuri picnic-site also on 1979.07.19, what gave a first impression of being a Horus Swift *Apus horus*, was seen skimming over the river in front of tall sand-banks. However, study through binoculars at close range immediately revealed characteristics like the square tail and streaked throat of the Mottled Spinetail. Only one spinetail was seen flying around this locality. Kemp (1974) mentions that this species is recorded from a single sight record at Pafuri.

R389 BATLIKE SPINETAIL *Neafrapus boehmi* WITPENSSTEKELSTERT

At the Pafuri bridge over the Levubu River (1979.07.17) we saw the deceptively small Batlike Spinetails. Rather unlike the Mottled Spinetail, this species is relatively easily identified by its size, stumpy tail, broad white rump, and white underparts except for the dusky throat and chest. Turning alternate dorsal and ventral views, this species can be accurately identified even at a considerable distance when one is

accustomed to it. Describing it as "very uncommon", Kemp (1974) records this species only from the Levubu River.

Order: Piciformes
R432 PIED BARBET *Lybius leucomelas* Family: Capitonidae
BONTHOUTKAPPER

Although widely distributed in the central region, Kemp (1974) mentions only two records in the north of the Park. This "very uncommon" species was additionally recorded near Baobab Hill, 34 km north of the junction between roads H13-1 and HI-8. (1979.07.19).

R446 BENNETT WOODPECKER *Campethera bennetti* Family: Picidae
BENNETTSPEG

Supplementing the "isolated" records from Klopperfontein and Punda Maria mentioned for this species by Kemp (1974), a female Bennett Woodpecker was observed at close range along the Mahonie drive which now surrounds Punda Maria, two km westwards in the direction of the Matukwala Dam (1979.07.18).

Order: Passeriformes
R498 PEARL-BREASTED SWALLOW Family: Hirundinidae
Hirundo dimidiata PÊRELBORSSWAEL

This species is described with status uncertain by Kemp (1974) from three localities: Pafuri, along the Shisha Spruit, and Nwanedzi. We recorded a pair at a bridge approximately 12 km south-east of the junction of roads H13-1 and HI-8, which probably corresponds with Kemp's second locality. Together with several Lesser Striped Swallows *H. abyssinica*, a pair of Wire-tailed Swallows *H. smithi* were also present here (1979.07.21).

R500 MOSQUE SWALLOW *Hirundo senegalensis* MOSKEESWAEL

Kemp (1974) describes this handsome species as very uncommon but a regular summer nomad to the area, and appearing to return to the same locality each year. Cullen (1979) recorded Mosque Swallows during winter, three times in May 1979 but further south than we did. From his and our winter records, this species requires a reassessment of status, and may be resident. We saw 13 Mosque Swallows at the Matukwala Dam (1979.07.18), 18 Mosque Swallows at the Maritubefontein Dam, that same morning, four Mosque Swallows on 1979.07.19 one km south of the locality near Baobab Hill where we recorded the Pied Barbet, and two Mosque Swallows two km north of the junction between roads H13-1 and HI-8 also on 1979.07.19.

R502 LARGER STRIPED SWALLOW *Hirundo cucullata* GROOTSTREEP-
BORSSWAEL

Describing it as rare and probably only a summer migrant to the area, Kemp (1974) records this species only from Punda Maria and the Bangu Gorge. We recorded two of these swallows (1979.07.20), 11 km westwards on the Mahonie drive as indicated for the Bennett Woodpecker.

R509 AFRICAN SANDMARTIN *Riparia paludicola* GEWONE OEWEERSWAEL

While watching Batlike Spinetails at the Pafuri bridge (1979.07.17), we also recorded this easily recognized species. Kemp (1974) states that it had only been recorded at points along the Olifants and Letaba Rivers, was uncommon and so far only recorded during winter.

Family: Campephagidae

R515 WHITE-BREASTED CUCKOO-SHRIKE *Coracina pectoralis* WITBORS-KATAKOEROE

Described as rare by Kemp (1974) and only recorded from Pafuri, Malahlapanga and Nwambiya Pan in the north, we regularly observed and even photographed one of these cuckoo-shrikes in the Punda Maria camp, from 1979.07.16. Another of this species was seen four days later, one km north-west of the Maritubefontein Dam on the Mahonie drive. Yet another was observed in the forest two km upstream from the Pafuri picnic-site (1979.07.19).

Family: Corvidae
WITHALSKRAAI

R524 WHITE-NECKED RAVEN *Corvus albicollis*

Noted as a rare vagrant to the area, and recorded only on the western boundary of the KNP near Punda Maria by Kemp (1974), we recorded a single raven in the Punda Maria camp (1979.07.18) and regularly thereafter, associating with a flock of about 15 Pied Crows *C. albus*.

Family: Turdidae

R576 STONE CHAT *Saxicola torquata* GEWONE BONTROKWAGTER

Kemp (1974) describes this species as very uncommon, only found in areas of open grassland, and an irregular winter nomad to the area. He recorded it from scattered localities over the whole Park. We saw a group of one male and two females 11 km westwards along road S60 towards Klopperfontein (1979.07.20).

Family: Sylviidae

R600 YELLOW-BELLIED EREMOMELA
Eremomela icteropygialis • GEELPENS-TINKTINKIE

This species is only so far recorded from Shawo, Mlondozi Dam, the Mbadze Picket and near Lower Sabi by Kemp (1974), who termed it very uncommon. Almost our last significant record in the KNP, while travelling towards the Phalaborwa gate (1979.07.21), was one of these tiny warblers 36 km west of Letaba. We had stopped to watch a lone sable bull, and the tiny Yellow-bellied Eremomela walked across the road immediately in front of us, unable to fly with an injured wing.

R628 GREY-BACKED BUSH WARBLER *Camaroptera brevicaudata* GRYS-RUGTINKTINKIE

Only recorded from Pafuri and the Bangu Gorge by Kemp (1974), with status uncertain. We observed and heard this species several times in Punda Maria camp,

from 1979.07.16. We also saw it the next day two km north-westwards on the Nyala drive (road S64), near the Pafuri picnic-site.

R615 LESSER BARRED WARBLER *Camaroptera stierlingi* KLEIN-
GESTREEPTE TINKTINKIE

Only the sibling Larger Barred Warbler *C. fasciolata* is recorded by Kemp (1974), described as uncommon and so far recorded from widely scattered localities in the south and central regions of the Park. Unfortunately without localities given, Pienaar & Prozesky (1961) record *Camaroptera fasciolata stierlingi*. The issue is therefore confused, a legacy of the ill-advised and rather incredible former lumping of these two distinct species by taxonomists. The Larger Barred Warbler apparently has a breeding plumage during which the underparts are suffused with brown, but this plumage is unrecorded in the Lesser Barred Warbler. At the far northern locality of Maritubefontein Dam, on 1979.07.18, we saw what was undoubtedly a specimen of the Lesser Barred Warbler, clearly distinguished by the cinnamon thighs and barred vent. The species is probably not a new record for the KNP, but rather reflects the past taxonomic confusion.

R620 REDWING WARBLER *Heliolais erythroptera* ROOIVLERKTINKTINKIE

This small warbler was incorporated by Pienaar & Prozesky (1967) on the basis of a sight-record with even its high-pitched song recorded by C. Haagner in October 1961. However, this species was rejected by Kemp (1974), who categorized it as thought to be a misidentification. Kemp (1974) stated that this call was that of the Red-faced Cisticola *Cisticola erythroptera*, now known to occur widely in the KNP, and with a different call (K.B. Newman, *pers. comm.*). Due to the confusion, investigations were made after we saw it ourselves. The first South African record of the Redwing Warbler was apparently made by G. M. Adendorff on 23 March 1958, of three birds at the Matukwala Dam now on the Mahonie drive, indicated on Fig. 1 as Locality 1. A second record of this species was made by Adendorff (*pers. comm.*) at the western extremity of the Nyala drive, known as the Valley of the Giants from the baobabs occurring there (Locality 2), but he has as yet been unable to determine the exact date. Haagner (*pers. comm.*) saw this warbler and recorded its song given from a small bush in open grassland abutting the riverine bush (Locality 3).

On 1979.07.16 we clearly observed this small but distinctive species at close range near Punda Maria (Locality 4). It moved from tall *Setaria* sp. grasses, with inflorescences then seedless, to knobthorn *Acacia nigrescens* saplings, where it apparently searched for insects in a manner reminiscent of robins. Good field characteristics were the distinctive reddish wings, the heavy *Acrocephalus*-like bill, the greyish cheeks with contrasting iris, and the markings near the tips of the rectrices. When the Redwing Warbler flew, the tail markings were clear and appeared to form an ellipse. At least two specimens were present, with a probable third. There was no possibility of confusion with species like the Tawny-flanked Prinia *P. subflava* or Rattling Cisticola *C. chiniana*, both of which were present at the same locality. We have no doubt that this species, which occurs in neighbouring Rhodesia and Mocambique, should be added to the South African list.

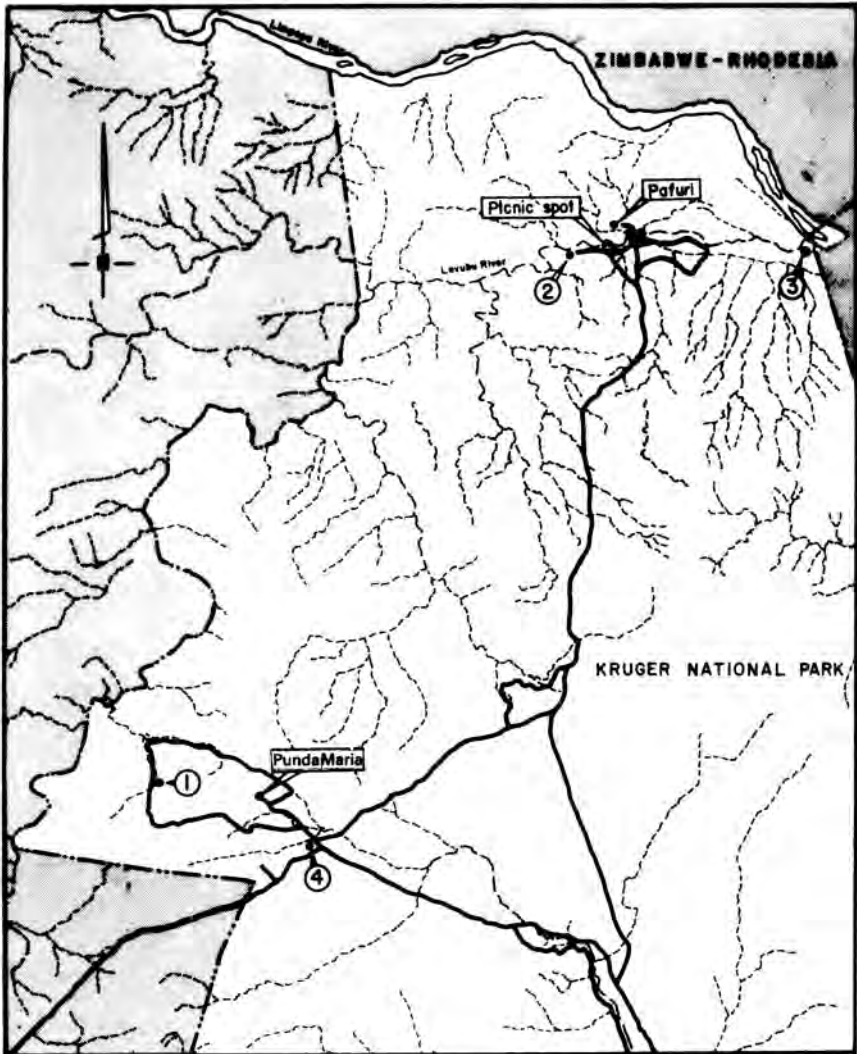


Fig. 1. Recorded localities of the Redwing Warbler *Heliolais erythroptera* in the Kruger National Park.

R650 BLACK-CHESTED PRINIA *Prinia flavicans* SWARTBORS-LANG-STERTTINKTINKIE

Although only the closely related Tawny-flanked Prinia *P. subflava* is recorded from the KNP, specimens noted without further ado as the Black-chested Prinia were recorded by us near Punda Maria. As the birds were in winter plumage and we were then unaware that this species had not been recorded in the Park, insufficient attention was paid to these birds which are familiar to us. Consequently a positive identification is not made. Observers in the far north are urged to watch out for Black-chested Prinias. We did record Tawny-flanked Prinias here as well.

Family: Muscicapidae

R655 DUSKY FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa adusta* DONKERVLIEËVANGER

This species is recorded only from Satara, Balule and Lower Sabie by Kemp (1974), who indicated that it would probably be recorded over a wider area. We recorded it at a parking spot nine km westwards along the Mahonie drive near Punda Maria, on both the morning and afternoon of 1979.07.18. On the second occasion the flycatcher entered an old barbet nest, but seemed to be only looking for insects.

Family: Motacillidae

R686 CAPE WAGTAIL *Motacilla capensis* GEWONE KWIKSTERT

Recorded by Kemp (1974) only for five southern localities and Shingwedzi, this "very uncommon" species was recorded from the Letaba River together with the Kittlitz Plovers already described.

Family: Sturnidae

R739 LESSER BLUE-EARED GLOSSY STARLING *Lamprotornis chloropterus*
KLEIN-BLOUOORSPREEU

A tentative record was made of this starling (1979.07.19) from near Baobab Hill*, as already described for the Pied Barbet. We saw numerous Cape Glossy Starlings *L. nitens* and Greater Blue-eared Glossy Starlings *L. chalybeus* during our visit, as well as recording Long-tailed Glossy Starling *L. mevesi* at the Pafuri bridge. Our attention was immediately drawn to two small glossy starlings which appeared dark on a dull overcast day. We know the Black-bellied Glossy Starling *L. corruscus* well from the Natal South Coast, which these were not. One of us has previously mist-netted the Lesser Blue-eared Glossy Starling in Zululand just south of Pongola (Milstein 1971). Newman in McLachlan & Liversidge (1978) has well illustrated what appears to be a reasonable field distinguishing characteristic between the Greater and Lesser Blue-ears: that the Greater appears to show two rows of dark spots on the upper primary coverts, while the Lesser tends to show only the lower row. Our initial impression of darkness was due to the overcast sky, but these small starlings only showed the lower row of covert spots, and were probably Lesser Blue-eared Glossy Starlings, not yet recorded from the Park.

Family: Nectariniidae

R756 PURPLE-BANDED SUNBIRD *Nectarinia bifasciata* PURPURBAND-
SUIKERBEKKIE

We recorded this species on the Nyala drive as already described for the Grey-backed Bush Warbler on 1979.07.17. This species superficially resembles the Marico Sunbird *N. mariquensis*, which we also saw eight km north-west of Shingwedzi (1979.07.21), but they are clearly distinguishable with experience. One of us had previously mist-netted and photographed both species together at Lake Chuali in Mocambique. We consequently verify the occurrence of the Purple-banded Sunbird, reasonably queried by Kemp (1974).

* Ms. received 80.06.12

R777 YELLOW WHITE-EYE *Zosterops senegalensis* Family: Zosteropidae
GEELGLASOGIE

Kemp (1974) records single sightings from Punda Maria and Letaba, and suggested that verification is needed. On 1979.07.19 at the same locality two km upstream from the Pafuri picnic-site, we clearly observed Yellow White-eyes foraging along the Levubu River, and consequently confirm the occurrence of this species.

R790 FOREST WEAVER *Symplectes (Ploceus) bicolor* Family: Ploceidae
BOSVINK

At the Pafuri picnic-site on 1979.07.17 and 1979.07.19 at least two weavers of this distinctive species were seen, and the unmistakable call heard. We know this species well from the Natal South Coast. It is surprising that this weaver does not seem to be previously recorded from the Park.

R843 COMMON WAXBILL *Estrilda astrild* Family: Estrildidae
ROOIBEKSYSIE

Kemp (1974) states that this species is widely recorded in the southern half of the KNP, but only two northern records — Shipudza and Malahlapanga. Common Waxbills probably show seasonal occurrences correlated with rainfall, because between 1979.07.18-21 we recorded the species at six northern localities: two km upstream from the Pafuri picnic-site, 25 km south of the Pafuri bridge, one km and 10 km westwards along the Mahonie drive, 13 km south-east of the junction of roads H13-1 and HI8, and 78 km southward of Shingwidzi.

R837 RED-BILLED FIREFINCH *Lagonosticta senegala* KLEINROBBIN

Noted as widespread in the central region of the KNP but with only one northern record at Pafuri, Kemp (1974) suspected wider distribution. We observed this species on 1979.07.16 at the Thulamila fountain near Punda Maria.

R863 BULLY CANARY *Serinus sulphuratus* Family: Fringillidae
DIKBEKKANARIE

Possibly overlooked as a result of its superficial similarity to the common Yellow-eye Canary, the Bully Canary does not seem to have been previously recorded from the Kruger National Park. We observed a single specimen (1979.07.17) perched on a low bush near the eastern extremity of the present S62-S63 loop road east of the Pafuri bridge.

R867 STREAKY-HEADED CANARY *Serinus gularis* STREEPKOPKANARIE

Recorded near Klopperfontein, at Bangu Gorge, Pumbe, Ngwenyeni Dam, Nkuane and Munwini by Kemp (1974), he considered it to be very uncommon and only a summer nomad to the area. It may be resident, for on 1979.07.18 we recorded one of these canaries nine km westwards on the Mahonie drive near Punda Maria, and two days later a small flock of five 10 km westwards on the same drive.

General

Due to the time of year, little breeding was observed. On 1979.07.19, both male and female Cardinal woodpeckers *Dendropicos fuscescens* were excavating a nest-hole six metres up in an Ana tree *Acacia albida* two km upstream from the Pafuri picnic-site. Six km westwards on the Mahonie drive near Punda Maria, Grey-headed sparrows *Passer griseus* were apparently feeding chicks (1979.07.20) in an old barbet nest-hole. At the western point of road S64, Goliath herons *Ardea goliath* were observed (1979.07.17) displaying in the Levubu River. Perched on a log, the probable male gave a "bitternig" display (Milstein, Prestt & Bell 1970) three times. This spectacular display may be typical of the *Ardea* herons. The male was apparently stimulated by the probable female perched nearby, and each time uttered an "oop-ooop-ooop" call. Two km upstream from the Pafuri picnic-site, we observed (1979.07.19) a flock of at least 11 Crested Guineafowl *Guttera edouardi* across the river in a feeding association with a troop of baboons. The guineafowl were clearly following the baboons closely, and feeding on unidentifiable food dropped by the baboons. We are grateful to District Ranger L. van Rooyen for permitting us to visit the fig forest at this site on the Levubu River in the hope of calling up the African Broadbill *Smithornis capensis* at the request of Mr K. B. Newman. The lack of undergrowth in the forest and type of undergrowth adjoining is, however, unsuitable for the species in our experience, and our attempt was unsuccessful.

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